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26 December 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist Reactions to Certain US Military Operations in
Vietnam

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. How would the Communists react to US operations in the northern portion of the DMZ or in immediately adjacent territory of North Vietnam? We think the primary factor influencing their reactions would be what they believed these actions portended for the future. Would they judge that the US was making the first rather tentative moves toward an eventual massive invasions of North Vietnam and thus to a major change in the war? Would they think that the time had come to request substantial numbers of "volunteers" from other Communist countries to supplement North Vietnamese forces? At what point would Chinese combat troops be likely to enter North Vietnam in some numbers?

2. The answers to such questions would depend to a very great extent on the size, scope and circumstances of the US operations. Nevertheless, it is not possible to estimate specific reactions with

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much confidence, because the Communists ~~will~~^{would} not only have to take some immediate measures to cope the new tactical situation but ~~will~~^{would} also undertake some longer term preparations to deal with possible future US actions. In effect, even the smallest US operation would set in motion two sets of reaction, and the longer term preparations might be the more significant from the US standpoint.

3. Despite such uncertainties, we think the following general estimates can be made:

-- The more limited the size, scope and duration of US operations the more likely that the Communist would limit their own response to tactical countermeasures. As long as the operations were fairly small-scale (e.g. not more than a few battalions) there probably would not be much change in Communist strategy or policy.

-- It would make some difference if small scale actions^{ed} extend to North Vietnamese territory, but the difference would probably be mainly in the Communist political-propaganda reaction.

-- Even fairly small scale operations would arouse greater apprehension and provoke more far reaching countermeasures, if they occurred along with or following new ground actions in Laos and/or Cambodia.

-- As for large scale actions, we cannot be certain at what point Hanoi would request the deployment of Chinese combat forces to North Vietnam; probably not until such operations were extended into North Vietnamese territory. Even then the aim of Hanoi and Peking would be deterrence rather than the immediate intervention of the Chinese in combat.

-- No Soviet intervention is likely, even if large scale operations are carried into North Vietnamese territory around the DMZ. Some use of Soviet "volunteers" is likely, however, as is increased material assistance.

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